Clare Sheridan's Diary

MY AMERICAN DIARY. By Clare Sheridan. Boni & Liveright.

MRS. SHERIDAN, who has written a second book of her experiences, called "My American Diary," thinks that she sees in the diary of Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortly, written in 1850, a precedent for her own literary adventures in this country and Mexico. She admits, however, that the former traveler from England wrote with the unconscious arrogance of an aristocrat for whom there was "no Bohemianism." So an important difference is at once established. Mrs. Sheridan's enjoyment of the varied hospitality offered to her in New York must have made the task of her hosts as easy as it was delightful. She could enjoy herself as much with Griffin Barry in an Italian restaurant in Greenwich Village as she could on the roof garden of a Brooklyn hotel done up as a ship for the guests, who studied from aloft the beauties of the Manhattan skyline But they both went to Mexico, both were upset by the elements in the hotel at Vera Cruz and had a bad night. So maybe they are, after all, analogous figures in literary life.

Mrs. Sheridan leaves the disquieting personalities of her New York experiences behind her when she sets out for Mexico, but even on this journey there is some evidence that she may be a poor judge of men, whom she pretends to understand so well. On the way to Vera Cruz a "young man insisted on attaching himself. He is a Mexican architect, who has just graduated from the university at Philadelphia. He will be very useful at Vera Cruz with the luggage." Yet only a page further on the writer is compelled to change her mind, which plainly dwelt on the luggage. She met a "reliable" American, who had many good qualities, which are recited in the description of him. But all were meant to lead up to his most important attribute. "It is he," is Mrs. Sheridan's final conclusion, "and not the young Mexican architect, who promises to be useful with the luggage at Vera Cruz."

This time the writer's estimate of character was finally correct, but it was necessary at least once for this "reliable American" to take a hand in the traveler's affairs before her destination was reached. The vessel stopped at Progreso to unload cargo and take on new passengers. "One of our fellow travelers is a Syrian Jew going ashore at Progreso," writes the sculptress, "and invited me to go with him to see the town, but the reliable American assured me the Syrian would delay me sightseeing until after the departure of our ship and he thought my adventures need not begin quite so soon." So she remained on board.

The voyage continued without possible adventure and the reliable American proved to have a partner just as thoroughly to be counted on. He gave up his room in the hotel at Vera Cruz because no other was to be had and it was no fault of his that the storm raged and the water came through the roof so persistently that the beds had to be pulled all over the apartment in search of a dry spot. Then there followed the long trip to the city of Mexico, which had almost exhausted the strength of the party before it came to an end, so exasperating were the heat and the slowness of the trip and the deportment of her fellow passengers.

In Mexico city she received the cabled news of her "Aunt Jennie's" death. This was Lady Randolph Churchill, with whom Mrs. Sheridan was thrown in her youth in London. "She used to say to me," she writes, "'While you are dressing, put your mind to it and do the best you can with yourself. After that never give your appearance another thought.' She would scold me unmercifully if I did not make an effort to talk to whatever man I sat next to at luncheon or dinner. Remember you are asked not for your amusement, but to contribute something to the party."

There is the apology of the writer for visiting the famous cathedral that "banal as it sounds one must visit cathedrals." There were country clubs as well and the celebration of the Fourth of July, in which the Mexicans only took a half-hearted interest. Excursions invited on every side, but Mrs. Sheridan had not yet got down to the business which had brought her and her son so far from Greenwich Village and Fifth avenue. She had come to make a bust of Gen. Obregon. But he refused—to be sure, most politely, as the old play has it, but he was nevertheless firm. The health of the six-year-old boy did not seem always improved by the climatic conditions of Mexico and the return was ultimately undertaken. Tampico was the point of departure. The author soon concluded that it was a town for men and observed that everything opened on the street. "I include at night a quarter of the town," she writes, "where the ladies sit outside their open, lit up doorways displaying a big bedded, small room inside. These houses are almost standardized, varying only in the manner of their light, some preferring pink to the cruder, unshaded electric globe."

Mrs. Sheridan's observations of life in Mexico soon became less civilized. There was a journey through the Tampico oil fields, an encampment in the open, and then a slow return to Los Angeles. But Charles Chaplin was not there, and in spite of the courtesy of the movie agents the traveler went up to San Francisco for a brief alternation of life at Burlingame and study of prison conditions at San Quentin. But Charles came back and Mrs. Sheridan, who had returned to Los Angeles, had to depart most completely from the way of Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortly, who, of course, never had the opportunity to commune so sacredly with a star of the camera. There is, in this interesting finale of her journal, no possible trace of "the unconscious arrogance of a genteel aristocrat." There seems little or no foundation, to judge by this book, for Mrs. Sheridan's complaint that this country has turned her from an artist into a writer. There is frequent evidence that this change may not, after all, have been skin deep. But one who tells of her travels with such evident enjoyment and such complete confidence will doubtless find other lands and other peoples to write about. Maybe she will try the South Sea Islands.

LAWRENCE REAMER.

Some Modern Plays

IF. By Lord Dunsany. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

THE IMAGE AND OTHER PLAYS. By Lady Gregory. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

THE LAMP AND THE BELL. By Edna St. Vincent Millay. Frank Shay.

FIRST and last, what innumerable proverbs sprout from that subjunctive vocable as short as possible and gravid with all the bad and good luck in the world. What unthinkable romances may not root in its mystic power? "If" is next to no word at all, the nearest inaudible vowel sound joined with the most insignificant breathing, and "abracadabra" is an eleven-lettered, five-pointed star of fate—its letters form a magic square—known to King Solomon and all the rulers of old Persia and of the farthest Indies. "Abracadabra" was engraved upon talismans when the world was young, and its spell is mighty; but how its boasted might shrivels up and blows away like a little dead leaf in the presence of that master-key of the possible—"If"! Why, Adam discovered the magic of that word before the angel drave him out of Eden, and he turned upon his restless helpmate, with her taste for experiment, and said: "Oh, Eve, dear, if you hadn't!"

Lord Dunsany, eighteenth baron of his name, has touched this mighty charm-stone of mankind and its language, and a marvel was bound to result. Like the great magician that he is, he has not evoked a bolt to strike mankind dumb and dead, but in the fullness of his mastery of magic he has but invited a shower of celestial scintillations as surely planned not to destroy even his least worthy readers as the momentary stars of Japanese fireworks are powerless to burn children who stand unscathed in the glittering shower. His range is from a London suburb to the most extremely far and imaginary East, yet you are just as safe in the tents of Al Shaldomir as in The Acacias at Blackheath, no matter what Oriental games are played.

This is a new play, in four acts and many scenes, which turns upon the chance that if a suburbanite should or should not miss the 8:15 train his whole life might be changed. Sounds fantastic and improbable, no doubt. Well, it is fantastic in Lord Dunsany's best manner, and anything more extremely improbable might be hard for even Lord Dunsany to think up. Yet why should he not turn the impossible inside out? He has the talisman—"If"!

Throughout this delightful drama, in which British and Oriental characters are shown in fine contrast, there are several pinnacles of dim, remote beauty scarcely to be described in words—they mount to the shadowy vanishing point in the other of the unspoken thought. Lord Dunsany's intrepidity is admirably displayed in his calm trust that the reader—or the auditor—will not miss his points. Even in the present regrettable condition of many readers and many audiences his confidence will probably be justified; his invitations to supplementary thought will not go unanswered. Particularly, we should say, the opportunity offered to the audience at the end of the second act. And the several and various implications from which the audience is permitted to draw its own inferences touching the impulses and capacities of the heroine, Miralda, betray a studied effort on the part of the dramatist to do justice to certain puissant idosyncrasies of the once supposedly gentler sex. This is a new play, awaiting its first production. It is likely to be a town-shaking success.

Lady Gregory's plays are all so instinct with the tang of her race and so adorned by her intelligence, artistry and literary skill that a new collection of them is sure of its ringing welcome. Her new book is called "The Image, and Other Plays," and contains, besides the title piece, "Hanrahan's Oath," "Shanwalla" and "The Wrens." "The Image" had its first edition in 1910 and was produced at the Abbey; "Hanrahan's Oath" was suggested to Lady Gregory by seeing a performance of "The Dumb Wife" in New York and wondering how a man would fare under such circumstances. "Shanwalla" (the story written around a horse) has a strong flavor of the psychic; and Lady Gregory in a note to the play writes that a friend versed in spiritual matters had said to her in talking of present tendencies toward belief in, or consciousness of, spirits invisible:

"I have no doubt at all there will be a return to intuition as in primitive days. Reason took its place, and reason was seized on with passion by the Greeks as a new force to be used in every possible field and way. But now it has gone as far as it can go; it has ceased to interest, to satisfy; it is to intuition we must turn for new discoveries." And Lady Gregory adds: "I said then to myself that my countryside tales are justified. These people of lonely bogs and hillsides have still their intuition, their sensitiveness to the unseen; they do not reason about it; they accept it as simply as they do the sighing of the west wind or the color of the sky."

"The Lamp and the Bell," a five act play, was written by that gifted young lady Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Vassar College Alumnæ Association and is "Dedicated to 1917." The names of performers in this anniversary production are printed with the cast of characters at the beginning.

Upon the central theme of women's mutual friendship and devotion Miss Millay has written a play purely Elizabethan in manner, made for a special occasion to which she wished to do honor and apparently undertaken as a serious imitation of the plays of that period. Her "method" has been successful, and the piece is constructed on the classical lines which she strove to follow. But she has written no mere imitation, no parody, no bare framework. Her own native imagination, feeling and grace of workmanship have carried her to distinct elevation over anything which she has achieved heretofore. The sincerity and sound quality of her text, the simple power in management of a situation and the limpid grace which is her hallmark are strikingly conspicuous.

W. S. M.